

GREEK SECURITY POLICY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

IDLIR LIKA

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SUMMARY

The analysis provides an overview of the Greek security policy in the Eastern Mediterranean since the failure of the latest round of Cyprus peace talks in July 2017 and highlights the continuity in the strategies employed by Greece to head off the perceived Turkish threat in the region.

Turkey has dominated the Greek security agenda for a long time as it is perceived as the main and most imminent source of external threat. The 2010 discovery of substantial offshore natural gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean added another hot button issue to the long-standing Turkish-Greek maritime disputes in the Aegean and over Cyprus. Realizing this discovery's potential of transforming the Eastern Mediterranean into an energy-exporting region, Athens has spearheaded the regional efforts to exclude Turkey from the exploration and transportation of the recently discovered gas. To realize its aim, Greek security policy has resorted to its two time-tested strategies: first, seeking to encircle Turkey through developing strategic ties with regional countries, and second, using its leverage within Western institutions to push back against Turkey.

Against this backdrop, the mid-2016 Israeli-Turkish reconciliation driven by shared natural gas interests and the prospect of building a gas pipeline between the two countries disquieted Greece. In response, Athens pushed the Greek Cypriots in torpedoing the most recent round of UN-sponsored talks to reunify Cyprus in July 2017, and thus dashed the hopes of an Israel-Turkey gas pipeline. Greece subsequently further developed its strategic ties with Israel and other regional countries and actively pursued an alternative route for transporting the Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe that would bypass Turkey. The outcome of these regional endeavors was the establish-

ment in Cairo, on January 14, 2019, of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, a seven-country entity that aims at promoting energy cooperation and that explicitly excludes Turkey. Ankara, in turn, sought to break the encirclement by signing a maritime border delineation and a defense cooperation agreement with the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli on November 27, 2019. In the costly tit for tat that developed, Greece pressed ahead with signing the East Mediterranean Pipeline Agreement with Cyprus and Israel, lobbied the U.S. Congress to lift the three-decade-old arms embargo on Cyprus, and is using its leverage within the EU to push back against Turkey and to block any political solution to the Libyan crisis unless the Turkey-GNA deal is nullified. The analysis concludes by pointing out that Greek security demands in the Eastern Mediterranean have generated backlash effects in the EU. Two of the EU big three, Germany and Italy, have come to realize that protecting the union's interests entails finding an approach that better balances the Greek and Turkish strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

INTRODUCTION

In a 2007 policy paper prepared for the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, a group of Greek military officers and defense experts argued that “Turkey is perceived by Greek security and defense policy as the main and most imminent source of external threat to its sovereignty and national interests” and that “Turkey is the prime security concern for Greece and as long as the core of their differences remains unresolved (namely Cyprus and the Aegean), Greece will continue to invest resources to its defense capability.”¹ Three years later, the discovery of the Aphrodite and Leviathan gas fields off the coasts of Cyprus and Israel added energy competition to the long-standing rivalry between Greece and Turkey, and came at a time when Greece was amid a severe financial crisis. To balance against the perceived Turkish threat coming now from three directions (Aegean, Cyprus, and energy), Greece would resort once more to its two time-tested strategies: trying to encircle Turkey through developing strategic ties with regional countries, and using its leverage within Western institutions to push back against Tur-

key. In IR terminology these constitute “soft balancing” strategies, referring to the nonmilitary (diplomatic, economic, institutional) tools states employ to balance against militarily superior rivals.² Indeed, as the aforementioned 2007 policy paper argued, “Greece relies on a mixture of diplomatic maneuvering, the strengthening of its Armed Forces and its membership to the European Union in order to balance Turkish military superiority.”³ For instance, during the 1990s, a time period when bilateral relations were extremely tense, Greece diplomatically attempted to establish an anti-Turkish coalition comprised of Armenia, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Bulgaria, and Russia; it developed close military and intelligence cooperation with Damascus; and in 2004, it used its leverage within the EU (by threatening to veto the accession of East European countries) to make Cyprus a full member.⁴

The 2010 discovery of natural gas deposits off the coasts of Cyprus and Israel transformed Israel into a key component of Greek endeavors to form a new anti-Turkish coalition in the Eastern Mediterranean. The time was ripe for a strategic partnership between Athens and Jerusalem given the serious rift in Israeli-Turkish relations following the May 2010 *Mavi Marmara* incident. Since 2010, Greece developed “a full-fledged strategy of cooperation with the state of Israel” by pursuing closer political, economic, and energy ties, but opting only for “limited security and military cooperation.”⁵ The Greek strategy of establishing a network of partnerships

2. Robert A. Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States”, *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 7-45; T.V. Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy”, *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 46-71.

3. Dokos, “Greek Security Policy in the 21st Century”, p. 6.

4. Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia’s Influence in Southeast Europe*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 121-122; 267.

5. Aristotle Tziampiris, *The Emergence of Israeli-Greek Cooperation*, (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2015), pp. 164-170.

1. Thanos Dokos (ed.), “Greek Security Policy in the 21st Century”, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Policy Paper No. 9, (2007), p. 21.

with regional countries in order to exclude Turkey from the natural gas bonanza has had its ups and downs though. In what follows, an overview of the recent Greek security moves in the geopolitical energy competition with Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean will be provided.

TORPEDOING CYPRUS PEACE TALKS AND THE ISRAEL-TURKEY PIPELINE

The June 2016 Israeli-Turkish reconciliation after six years of estrangement disquieted Greece for the very fact that this reconciliation was driven mainly by shared energy interests. As recent research on the topic makes clear, the November 2015 Russian-Turkish crisis pushed Ankara to seek other energy partners in the region in order to decrease its energy dependence on Russia, and it was indeed this gas interest that was “the main catalyst for reconciliation” with Israel.⁶ In February 2017, the stakeholder companies of Israel’s largest offshore gas field (Leviathan) even announced that a 300-mile pipeline to Turkey could be built by early 2021.⁷ At the time, Israel had strategic ties with Greece also, but energy interests trumped those considerations. It was clear to Israeli policymakers that the pipeline route to Turkey was the best option in terms of the short distance, low costs, and the large potential of the Turkish domestic market to absorb the gas and further transport it to the West.

However, any pipeline route to Turkey would have to traverse the Cypriot territory

and the Athens-backed Greek Cypriot leadership stated explicitly since the very beginning that it would block such a pipeline unless Ankara mends ties with Nicosia. Nicos Christodoulides, the Greek Cypriot government spokesman, explained at the time: “Everyone understands that it’s not possible for a state under occupation to approve a pipeline going to the occupying power.”⁸ In the context of such developments, the failure of the most recent round of UN-sponsored Cyprus peace talks at Crans Montana, Switzerland, in July 2017 was rather expected. The success of these talks would have given the green light to the Israel-Turkey pipeline, and that is why Greece pushed the Greek Cypriots to torpedo the agreement and use the leverage of their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to block the pipeline project Turkey strongly favored at the time. While it is true that Turkey’s refusal to withdraw/cut its military presence in Northern Cyprus is another important factor that can account for the failure of the July 2017 peace talks,⁹ geopolitical energy competition was the main catalyst for their collapse. Both Athens and Nicosia were quite content with the status quo and for them the continuation of the division of the island was far more preferable to a federal peace agreement where, among other things, they would have to share the energy revenues with Turkey and Turkish Cypriots.¹⁰ Hence, Greek security interests in the Eastern Mediterranean would be best served if Greek Cypriots “go it alone.”¹¹

6. Stephen J. Flanagan, F. Stephen Larrabee, Anika Binnendijk, Katherine Costello, Shira Efron, James Hoobler, Magdalena Kirchner, Jeffrey Martini, Alireza Nader, Peter A. Wilson, *Turkey’s Nationalist Course: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army*, (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2020), p. 88.

7. “Israel-Turkey Gas Pipeline Could Be Ready in Four Years – Company”, *Reuters*, March 2, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/israel-energy/israel-turkey-gas-pipeline-could-be-ready-in-four-years-company-idUSL5N1GF3ZO>, (Access date: February 2, 2020).

8. Michele Kambas, “Cyprus Blocks Israel-Turkey Gas Pipeline until Ankara Mends Ties”, *Haaretz*, July 6, 2016. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/cyprus-blocks-israel-turkey-pipeline-untilt-ankaramends-ties-1.5405907>, (Access date: February 2, 2020).

9. Thanos Dokos, Nathalie Tocci, Anja Palm, Can Kasapoglu, “Greek-Turkish Relations and the Cyprus Dispute: Impact on Turkey-EU Scenarios”, FEUTURE Online Paper No. 27 (December 2018), p. 14.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

11. International Crisis Group, “Aphrodite’s Gift: Can Cypriot Gas Power a New Dialogue?”, Europe Report No. 216, (April 2, 2012), p. 3.

THE COSTLY TIT FOR TAT: THE “BATTLE” OF PIPELINES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

While the failure of the July 2017 Cyprus reunification talks effectively dashed the hopes of an Israel-Turkey gas pipeline, Greece thereafter intensified its diplomatic efforts to establish an anti-Turkish coalition in the region and actively pursued alternative routes for transporting the Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe that would bypass Turkey. Indeed, only four months after the failure of the Cyprus peace talks, on December 5, 2017, Greece signed a memorandum of understanding with Cyprus, Italy, and Israel with financial support from the EU for constructing an East Mediterranean pipeline that would transport the gas from the coasts of Cyprus and Israel to Italy and mainland Europe via Greece.¹² One year later, during the 5th Israel-Greece-Cyprus summit on December 20, 2018, the three countries’ leaders announced that the East Mediterranean Pipeline Agreement would be signed within one year.¹³ The milestone in Greek diplomatic endeavors to encircle Turkey was the establishment on January 14, 2019, in Cairo, of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), a seven-country entity (Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Palestinian Authority, and Egypt) that aims at promoting energy cooperation and that explicitly excludes

Turkey.¹⁴ In January 2020, France officially requested to become EMGF’s eighth member, while the United States asked to join as an official observer, two moves that allegedly show the EMGF’s “strength and the depth of seriousness” according to the Egyptian oil minister.¹⁵

Turkey, on its part, had already taken concrete steps to break the Greek encirclement strategy long before the establishment of the EMGF. Having to rely only on one Turkish-friendly government in the region, the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli, Ankara has been supporting anti-Haftar forces in western Libya since the second half of 2014, and has insisted since October 2018 that the GNA sign a maritime border delineation agreement.¹⁶ Having faced Haftar’s offensive against Tripoli since April 2019 and being in great need of military support, the GNA signed an exclusive economic zone and defense cooperation agreement with Ankara on November 27, 2019. The Turkey-GNA deal represents Ankara’s attempt to break Greece’s encirclement strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁷ The exclusive economic zones agreed upon by Turkey and the GNA would cut off the East Mediterranean pipeline route that Cyprus, Greece, and Israel plan to build. As Turkish president Erdogan clearly

14. Cyril Widdershoven, “Energy: New Gas Power in the Making with East Med Gas Forum”, *Financial Mirror*, January 16, 2019. <https://www.financialmirror.com/2019/01/16/energy-new-gas-power-in-the-making-with-east-med-gas-forum/> (Access date: February 2, 2020).

15. Matthew Amlot, “New Members of East Med Gas Forum Show ‘Strength’ of Deal: Egypt Oil Minister”, *Al Arabiya English*, January 21, 2020. <http://englishalarabiya.net/en/business/energy/2020/01/21/New-members-of-East-Med-Gas-Forum-shows-strength-of-deal-Egypt-oil-minister.html> (Access date: February 2, 2020).

16. Michael Young, “Into the Libya Vortex”, *Carnegie Middle East Center*, January 14, 2020. https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/80776?fbclid=IwAR1pu5bRrRNhfTwfl_fFSxBkaHn3Mhll5c3pN17z1EuQBfEOR4pe8NEUWs (Access date: February 2, 2020).

17. “Cumhurbaşkanı Yardımcısı Oktay: Libya anlaşması ile bizi karaya hapsetme oyununu bozduk”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, January 1, 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/libya/cumhurbaskani-yardimcisi-oktay-libya-anlasmasi-ile-bizi-karaya-hapsetme-oyununu-bozduk/1689320> (Access date: February 2, 2020).

12. Kostis Geropoulos, “Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Israel Sign MoU for East Med Gas Pipeline”, *New Europe*, December 5, 2017. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/greece-cyprus-italy-israel-sign-mou-east-med-gas-pipeline/> (Access date: February 2, 2020).

13. “Israel, Greece, Cyprus to Ink Natural Gas Pipeline Deal Next Year, PM Says”, *The Times of Israel*, December 20, 2018. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-greece-cyprus-to-ink-natural-gas-pipeline-deal-next-year-pm-says/> (Access date: February 2, 2020).

stated, “Other international actors cannot carry out exploration operations in these areas Turkey drew with this accord without getting permission. Greek Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, and Israel cannot establish a gas transmission line without first getting permission from Turkey.”¹⁸

Essentially, the Turkey-GNA deal was a tit for tat for the actions of Athens and Nicosia in 2017. As explained above, during the latest round of UN-sponsored Cyprus peace talks in July 2017, Athens pushed the Greek Cypriot leadership to torpedo the talks and to use the leverage of their EEZ to block the Israel-Turkey gas pipeline that Turkey strongly favored at the time. Similarly, the November 2019 deal with the GNA is the result of Ankara using the leverage of its EEZ to block the East Mediterranean pipeline project that Greece strongly favors. Moreover, the Turkey-GNA deal dashes the hopes of the East Mediterranean pipeline because there is hardly any international company that would want to invest and explore in contested waters. In that sense, the deal hit the target.

USING LEVERAGE WITHIN WESTERN INSTITUTIONS TO PUSH BACK AGAINST TURKEY

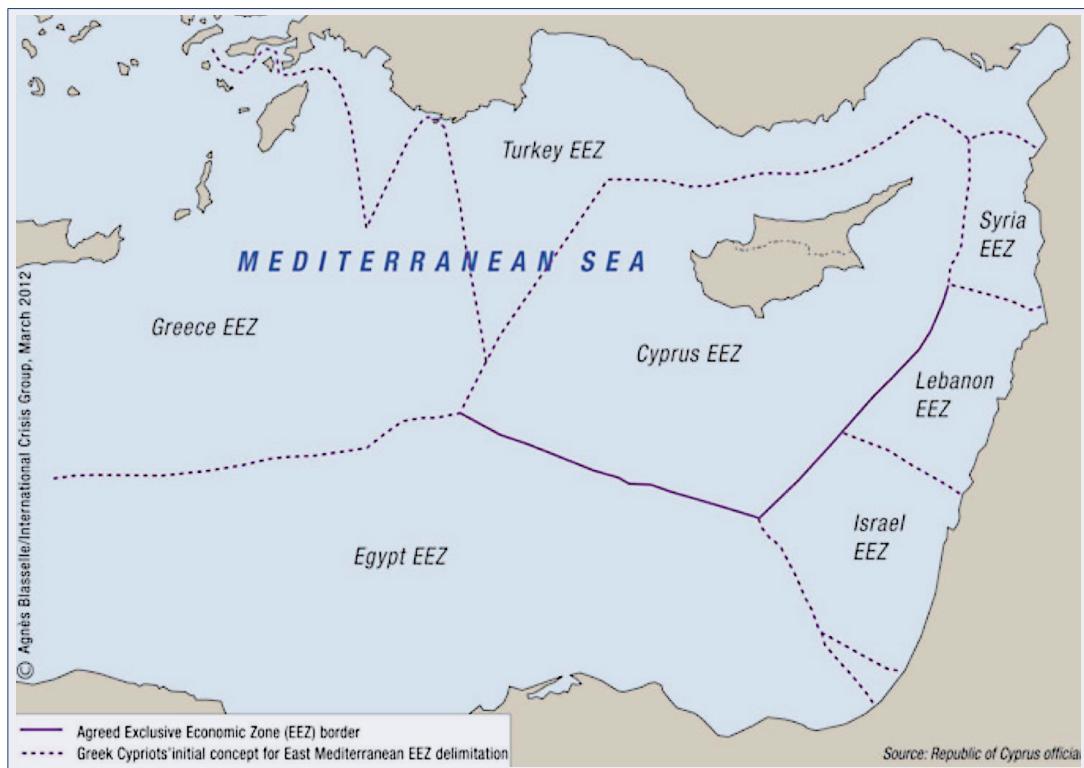
Greece was the most infuriated about the Turkey-GNA deal among the EMGF members because the deal partially blocked the East Mediterranean pipeline, and the deal’s agreed upon maritime borders skirt the Greek islands of Crete and Rhodes and allegedly infringe the Greek continental shelf. This brings back to the spotlight the long-standing Greek-Turkish maritime disputes

in the Aegean. In a nutshell, the central component of this dispute is the value of islands in determining a country’s national coastline and exclusive economic zone (EEZ). According to the Greek interpretation of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the convention also assigns an EEZ to islands.. If that is the case, Greece should have an EEZ that extends well into parts of the maritime area agreed upon by Turkey and Libya in November 2019. On the other hand, according to the Turkish interpretation of UNCLOS, which Turkey thus far has not signed, international law does not assign an EEZ to islands. Overall, this has been a very thorny issue in bilateral relations since many Greek islands (like Kastelorizo) lie just off Turkey’s coast, so if too much value is assigned to those islands in determining Greece’s EEZ, Turkey risks becoming restricted to its southern coastline and losing most of its economic rights in the Eastern Mediterranean (see figure below).

In this context, confronted with the Turkey-GNA deal, Athens resorted to one of its time-tested strategies: using its leverage within Western institutions to push back against Turkey. First, Athens pressed the EU to denounce the deal as unlawful, and indeed, on December 13, 2019, the European Council declared the Turkey-GNA deal as infringing upon the sovereign rights of third states, and unequivocally affirmed its solidarity with Greek and Cypriot concerns.¹⁹ Earlier in November 2019, Athens and Nicosia pressured the EU into sanctioning Turkey over its drilling off the coast of Cyprus.²⁰

19. “EU Leaders Slam Turkey-Libya Maritime Deal as Unlawful”, *Financial Mirror*, December 13, 2019. <https://www.financialmirror.com/2019/12/13/eu-leaders-slam-turkey-libya-maritime-deal-as-unlawful/> (Access date: February 2, 2020).

20. “EU Agrees Sanctions on Turkey over Cyprus Drilling, to Add Names Later”, *Reuters*, November 11, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyprus-turkey-eu/eu-agrees-sanctions-on-turkey-over-cyprus-drilling-to-add-names-later-idUSKBN1XL1MC> (Access date: February 3, 2020).



Source: International Crisis Group, "Aphrodite's Gift: Can Cypriot Gas Power a New Dialogue?", Europe Report No. 216, (April 2, 2012), p. 22.

Second, on December 17, 2019, the U.S. Congress passed with bipartisan support the *Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act* which, among other provisions, lifted the three-decade-old arms embargo on Cyprus and extended further foreign military assistance to Greece. The two main interest groups that strongly lobbied the U.S. Congress for this act were the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Hellenic American Leadership Council (HALC). They hailed the passing of the act as "a historic, truly transformational development in United States foreign policy" and pointed out that "[b]oth Democrats and Republicans realize that we can't rely today on Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. America's frontline in this strategically and economically vital region comprises Greece, Cyprus and Israel, as well as several Arab countries, beginning with Egypt and

Jordan."²¹ Overall, seen in conjunction with the defense cooperation agreement Turkey signed with the GNA, the lifting of the decade-old U.S. arms embargo on Cyprus and the increasing U.S. military assistance to Greece signifies the militarization of the geopolitical energy competition in the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, these latest moves indicate that the overall Greek strategy of "soft balancing" against Turkey might gradually evolve into "hard balancing."

Third, notwithstanding Turkish threats that no underwater pipeline can be built in the region without Turkey's consent, Greece pressed ahead with the East Mediterranean (EastMed) pipeline and on January 2, 2020, in Athens, Greece signed an agreement with Cyprus and Israel to construct

21. Katerina Sokou, "East Med Act a Milestone in US Foreign Policy", *Kathimerini*, December 28, 2019. <http://www.kathimerini.com/247921/article/ekathimerini/comment/east-med-act-a-milestone-in-us-foreign-policy> (Access date: February 2, 2020).



Source: "Kıbrıs devre dışı", Havadis, 3 May 2017. <https://www.havadiskibris.com/kibris-devre-disi/>

a 1,900-kilometer gas pipeline that would carry gas from the coasts of Cyprus and Israel to Europe via Greece. In line with the overview provided in this analysis, the EastMed pipeline has been described as "another front in the encirclement of Turkey."²² Yet, experts and policymakers alike have expressed doubts about the feasibility of such a project. Compared to the Israel-Turkey pipeline that was on the table three years ago and was widely viewed as the most financially viable option to transport the Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe, the EastMed pipeline will cost two times more (\$7 billion vs. \$3.75 billion) and will be four times as long (1,900 km vs. 500 km). Indeed, if completed, the EastMed pipeline will

be the longest and deepest underwater gas pipeline in the world.²³ What is more important, the mere fact that part of the route through which EastMed pipeline will pass constitutes contested waters (due to the Turkey-GNA deal) will likely keep most major companies on the sidelines. As even former Cypriot Foreign and Commerce Minister Nicos Rolandis acknowledged, "What is the likelihood of investors wanting to undertake such a costly project, given the threats and illegal actions of Turkey in the region? What company or group of companies would sink five to six billion euros into a project going through part of the sea on which Turkey and Libya have made claims through the recent signing of a memorandum of

22. Muhammad Hussein, "The EastMed Pipeline Is Another Front in the Encirclement of Turkey", *Middle East Monitor*, July 25, 2019. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190725-eastmed-another-front-in-the-encirclement-of-turkey/> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

23. "Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and Italy Agree on \$7 b. East Med Gas Pipeline to Europe", *Times of Israel*, November 24, 2018. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-cyprus-greece-italy-said-to-agree-on-east-med-gas-pipeline-to-europe/> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

understanding?”²⁴ All in all, it is clear that the EastMed Pipeline Agreement is merely a tit for tat for Turkey’s deal with the GNA since the project is hardly viable economically and politically. As aptly put by Dimitar Bechev, “Politics has hijacked Eastern Mediterranean gas.”²⁵ In this respect, the EastMed Pipeline project “may yet prove to be more of a pipedream than a pipeline.”²⁶

Greece’s strategy of using its leverage within Western institutions to push back against Turkey received a heavy blow when Germany did not invite Greece and Cyprus to the Berlin Summit on Libya on January 19, 2020. Another blow came when Italy declared that it was against the EastMed pipeline project on the ground that it was financially unfeasible.²⁷ Hence, the EU seems more than ever divided on how to respond to Greece’s anti-Turkish diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. With Germany and Italy tilting more toward Turkey for fear of being sidelined in the developments in the Eastern Mediterranean,²⁸ Greece has no choice but to rely further and develop stronger strategic ties with the third of the EU big three, namely France. Athens is already taking concrete steps in that direction. Indeed, during the visit of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to Paris on January 29, 2020, a defense cooperation

24. “Our View: We Need a Sense of Perspective over EastMed Pipeline”, *Cyprus Mail*, January 5, 2020. <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/01/05/our-view-we-need-a-sense-of-perspective-over-eastmed-pipeline/> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

25. Dimitar Bechev, “Politics Has Hijacked Eastern Mediterranean Gas”, *Ahval News*, January 7, 2020. <https://ahvalnews.com/energy-politics/politics-has-hijacked-eastern-mediterranean-gas-0> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

26. Charles Ellinas, “Changing Priorities Threatens Viability of EastMed Gas Pipeline”, *Cyprus Mail*, January 6, 2020. <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/01/06/changing-priorities-threatens-viability-of-eastmed-gas-pipeline/> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

27. Burhanettin Duran, “Is the Outcome of Berlin Meeting Step toward a Solution?”, *Daily Sabah*, January 23, 2020. <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2020/01/23/is-the-outcome-of-berlin-meeting-step-toward-a-solution> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

28. Burhanettin Duran, “Urban Legends about Turkey’s Foreign Policy”, *Daily Sabah*, January 19, 2020. <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2020/01/20/urban-legends-about-turkeys-foreign-policy> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

agreement was signed and it was agreed upon that France would dispatch frigates to the Eastern Mediterranean for joint drills with Greek and Cypriot vessels. Additionally, it is rumored that France will also deploy its only aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* to the south of the Greek island of Crete.²⁹

Overall, recent developments clearly show that Greece will find it harder to use its leverage within the EU to push back against Turkey. Two of the EU big three, Germany and Italy, have come to terms with the fact that protecting EU interests necessitates a more balanced approach toward Turkey that takes into account Turkish strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. The visits of both Italian and German heads of governments to Turkey in January 2019 are the best illustration of this. At the same time, Germany and Italy have come to realize that protecting EU interests entails also stopping Greece from taking the EU hostage with its security policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Greek statements that they would block any political solution to the Libyan crisis unless the Turkey-GNA deal is nullified³⁰ were not well received in Berlin and Rome. Equally important, Athens’s increasing security partnership with Macron’s France, the third EU big, a sponsor of the rebel leader Khalifa Haftar in eastern Libya, and the spoiler of EU enlargement toward the Western Balkans, might sow further divisions within the union. In the words of Burhanettin Duran, “For the sake of Europe’s long-term, common interests, Germany has to stop France and Greece.”³¹

29. “Fransa Girit’in Güneyine Uçak Gemisi Konuslandıracak”, *Deniz Ticaret Gazetesi*, January 27, 2020. <https://www.denizticaretgazetesi.org/gundem/fransa-giritin-guneyine-ucak-gemisi-konuslandiracak/13515> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

30. David Lepeska, “Europe Set to Slap Turkey for Erdogan’s ‘Anti-Diplomacy’”, *Ahval News*, January 22, 2020. <https://ahvalnews.com/eastern-mediterranean/europe-set-slap-turkey-erdogans-anti-diplomacy> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

31. Burhanettin Duran, “Germany Knows Road to Protecting EU Interests Relies on Turkey”, *Daily Sabah*, January 27, 2020. <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2020/01/28/germany-knows-road-to-protecting-eu-interests-relies-on-turkey> (Access date: February 3, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Turkey has dominated the Greek security agenda for a long time as it is perceived as the main and most imminent source of external threat. The 2010 discovery of substantial offshore natural gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean added energy competition to the long-standing rivalry between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean and over Cyprus. This analysis has provided an overview of Greece's regional efforts to exclude Turkey from the Eastern Mediterranean gas bonanza since the failure of the latest round of Cyprus peace talks in July 2017. It has pointed out that, competing with Turkey over energy resources, Greek security policy has resorted to its two time-tested strategies: first, seeking to encircle Turkey through developing strategic ties with regional countries, and second, using its leverage within Western institutions to push back against Turkey.

The first strategy has generated a costly tit for tat in the Eastern Mediterranean. During the most recent round of UN-sponsored Cyprus peace talks in July 2017, Athens pushed the Greek Cypriot leadership to torpedo the peace talks and to use the leverage of their EEZ to block the Israel-Turkey gas pipeline that Turkey strongly favored at the time. Similarly, with the November 2019 maritime deal with Libya, Ankara is now

using the leverage of its own EEZ to block the East Mediterranean pipeline project that Greece strongly favors. The second Greek strategy has produced mixed results. While Athens has been successful in having the EU denounce the Turkey-Libya deal as unlawful, in pushing EU sanctions against Turkey for its drilling activities off Cyprus's coast, and in lobbying the U.S. Congress for lifting the decade-old arms embargo on Cyprus, the Greek maximalist demands in the Eastern Mediterranean have generated backlash effects in the European Union. Two of the EU big three, Germany and Italy, have come to terms with the fact that protecting EU interests entails stopping Greece from taking the EU hostage with its demands, and finding an approach that better balances the Greek and Turkish strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. As a possible policy implication, EU interests in the Eastern Mediterranean would actually be best protected by a Greek-Turkish rapprochement. Just as the mid-1999 Greek-Turkish détente greatly facilitated the enlargement strategy of the EU at the time a new potential reconciliation between the two regional rivals would enhance the EU's ability to devise effective multilateral approaches to crisis management in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean in general.

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Turkey has dominated the Greek security agenda for a long time as it is perceived as the main and most imminent source of external threat. The 2010 discovery of substantial offshore natural gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean added another hot button issue to the long-standing Turkish-Greek maritime disputes in the Aegean and over Cyprus. Realizing this discovery's potential of transforming the Eastern Mediterranean into an energy-exporting region, Athens has spearheaded the regional efforts to exclude Turkey from the exploration and transportation of the recently discovered gas. To realize its aim, Greek security policy has resorted to its two time-tested strategies: first, seeking to encircle Turkey through developing strategic ties with regional countries, and second, using its leverage within Western institutions to push back against Turkey.

Against this backdrop, the mid-2016 Israeli-Turkish reconciliation driven by shared natural gas interests and the prospect of building a gas pipeline between the two countries disquieted Greece. In response, Athens pushed the Greek Cypriots in torpedoing the most recent round of UN-sponsored talks to reunify Cyprus in July 2017, and thus dashed the hopes of an Israel-Turkey gas pipeline. Greece subsequently further developed its strategic ties with Israel and other regional countries and actively pursued an alternative route for transporting the Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe that would bypass Turkey. The outcome of these regional endeavors was the establishment in Cairo, on January 14, 2019, of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, a seven-country entity that aims at promoting energy cooperation and that explicitly excludes Turkey. Ankara, in turn, sought to break the encirclement by signing a maritime border delineation and a defense cooperation agreement with the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli on November 27, 2019. In the costly tit for tat that developed, Greece pressed ahead with signing the East Mediterranean Pipeline Agreement with Cyprus and Israel, lobbied the U.S. Congress to lift the three-decade-old arms embargo on Cyprus, and is using its leverage within the EU to push back against Turkey and to block any political solution to the Libyan crisis unless the Turkey-GNA deal is nullified. The analysis concludes by pointing out that Greek security demands in the Eastern Mediterranean have generated backlash effects in the EU. Two of the EU big three, Germany and Italy, have come to realize that protecting the union's interests entails finding an approach that better balances the Greek and Turkish strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.